

THE CORRESPONDENT.

MAGNA EST VERITAS ET PREVALEBIT.

BY GEORGE HOUSTON, EDITOR AND PROPRIETOR.

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CORRESPONDENCE.

THE GODS.

Mr. Editor—In all ages mankind have believed in superior beings who took an interest in their affairs. It was a necessary consequence of this belief to conclude that some particular behaviour and conduct of men was agreeable to these beings, and fitted to procure their assistance and good will; and that some other conduct was disagreeable to them, and fitted to produce their resentment and indignation. Benevolence and resentment are passions which not mankind only, but all other animals are subject to. They seem inseparable from all existence susceptible of pain or pleasure. Mankind have, therefore, freely attributed these passions to those superior beings. Having thus bestowed on them some of the human passions, it was very difficult to avoid attributing to them others: they have accordingly attributed to them most, or all of the human passions.

These beings have generally been conceived not to resemble men in this—that they were never seen, heard, or felt, except in particular instances. Their abode was supposed to be at a distance from us, in heaven: and as the instances of their appearance to men were not very well attested, they were known chiefly from the effects which they produced. As these effects were much beyond the strength of man, or of the animal creation to produce, they must necessarily attribute to them, as in fact they did, infinitely more power. In every other respect the gods of the earth have at all times been mere men, acting in the same manner, and endued with the same passions, good and bad. It has been said that “God made man after his own image:” the reverse of the proposition is true—that men formed the gods after their own image; nor was it possible for them to form them after any other.

Men were desirous of painting their gods as perfect as possible. Perfection is a mere relative term: things are perfect only as they are applicable to the purposes for which they are intended. Man, knowing his own purposes and not the purposes of beings of a different nature, if he shall ascribe purposes to the gods, must necessarily ascribe to them his own purposes. He thinks these the best possible in nature, because they are in fact the best for him in his situation. The organization, the virtues of men, are certainly the best adapted; consequently the most perfect of any thing in nature that we are acquainted with to an-

swer our purposes. If, therefore, men shall be so presumptuous as to paint in their imaginations superior beings who were never subjected to their senses, they must necessarily paint them men.

We accordingly find the gods, as described by different people professing the different religions of the earth, vulgar and contemptible in proportion to the barbarity of the age in which those religions were established, and rising in sublimity in proportion to the degree of philosophical and moral knowledge which prevailed. The gods are described in the different religions of the earth as men are formed in the different periods of society. Perhaps there is not a more certain method of judging with tolerable accuracy of the manners, character, philosophical and moral knowledge of men in the different ages of the world, than by considering attentively their different religions.

This universal assent of mankind to the existence of a god or gods of some kind or other, has been considered by many ingenious men as a proof of the existence of one god, creator, preserver, and superintendent of the universe. But this argument seems to have little weight when we consider that the gods of most of the religions of the earth have as little connexion with the idea of a Supreme God, creator and preserver of the universe, as have the devils in Milton, the genii of eastern nations, or the faries of our ancestors; a set of beings equally superior to us in power, but equally subjected to all human passions, and in subjection to these passions; perpetually counteracting the operations of nature, and the best established principles of moral rectitude. The belief of the existence of such gods, is surely more pernicious to mankind than the absolute disbelief of the existence of any god. Gods who are supposed frequently to counteract their own natural laws, which they have established for the government of the world, and the moral laws which they have imprinted in every good man's mind for the regulation of his conduct, are tyrants which men would better want, for the same reason that men had better want government than be subject to the will of capricious rulers who feel themselves bound by no law which can be known to those whom they govern.

The primary notions of mankind seem to have arisen from a principle implanted in us by nature for our preservation—which is fear. We are afraid of every thing we are not accustomed to see if we have not already seen something analogous to it. This principle is strong in proportion to our weakness and ignorance. It has the greatest effect on us in extreme youth, and seems gradually to lose its force with age and knowledge.

This natural fear is evidently the origin of fairies, ghosts, and apparitions; and most probably of the very absurd notions which mankind have entertained in all ages of gods and devils. Men were afraid, and they knew not of what. It was evidently something that was not visible, for they saw nothing. They must have concluded it had pernicious qualities, and a power of hurting them, or they would not have been afraid. Thus they first conceived invisible, wicked beings to be the cause of their fear. In their transactions in life they met with misfortunes for which they could not account. It was most natural for them to attribute these misfortunes to those invisible beings, the objects of their fear.

Having thus conceived they had discovered malignant spirits, the transition was easy to good spirits. Some men felt themselves in happier situations than others. It was most natural for them to attribute their happiness to good beings, to whom they bore gratitude in proportion to their happiness. They found different ranks in society among men; they supposed, therefore, the same distinction amongst gods. Thus the world became peopled with fairies, apparitions, genii, gods, angels, and devils.

This account of these fictitious beings seems the more probable, as times of the greatest ignorance have always been the times of the greatest superstition, and superstition has always prevailed the most amongst the vulgar. When men are ignorant, and observe uncommon phenomena, which they are not able to explain, or meet with good or bad fortune which they cannot account for, they must ascribe it to some supernatural cause, the immediate interference of gods or devils, or of their agents. Whereas men of experience and reflection find as much cause for wonder and admiration in the most common occurrence in life, as in the most uncommon: in a stone falling to the ground, or a candle burning in its socket, as in tempests, whirlwinds, and earthquakes. They have observed some general operations of nature which prevail universally, and which have enabled them to explain some uncommon phenomena; and they conclude with much appearance of truth, that a more perfect acquaintance with the principles of nature would enable them to explain other phenomena. It is not many years ago that a man who possessed the ordinary acquirements of the present day, would have been taken for a wizard, and, perhaps, burnt at a stake. Friar Bacon was supposed to have sold himself to the devil. The mathematicians who went to measure a degree of the meridian at the equator were taken for sorcerers. In these days, when we see a man perform any wonderful thing, we conclude, that he understands some principle of nature with which we are unacquainted, and we have never been deceived.

But whatever was the origin of the numerous fantastic religions which we find established in the world, certain it is they all bear the marks of considerable antiquity, barbarism and ignorance. The gods of the earth are not only men with the passions and virtues which are universally perceived in all periods of society, but they possess the vices which disgrace men, and which could only have been attributed to them through extreme ignorance. They love flattery and adoration; they are delighted with solicitation and prayer; they are moved to alter their own will at the desire and entreaties of men; they are generally partial to some chosen people, and consequently unjust to the rest of mankind; they have all been represented as jealous, susceptible of anger and resentment; as receiving favors and services from men, for which they were grateful; as desiring gifts and sacrifices; for, although the sacrifice of living animals has been abolished in several of the modern religions, yet other sacrifices of a more important nature have constantly been required for the use of their priests and churches, and supposed useful, even essential, for securing the friendship, or appeasing the resentment of the deity.

If there be an intelligent being, creator, and preserver of the universe

it requires but a moment's reflection to perceive that it is impossible he can possess such attributes. They all imply a degree of weakness and ignorance, inconsistent with the idea of the creator's power and wisdom.

But what indicates a still greater degree of barbarity than attributing to a deity the weakness and vices of men is, the supposing him particularly favorable to the poor and ignorant; pleased with idleness; with the voluntary mortifications and sufferings of men; requiring of them to sacrifice to him their reason, that test given them for their belief and conduct, and to adopt another test not consistent with it. All which implies a wonderful degree of depravity; and we might have been assured, if they themselves had not informed us of it, that the authors of such religions not only lived in a barbarous age, but that they were the poorest and most ignorant of the age in which they lived.

In the early ages, as men had eyes, they could not avoid perceiving some of the wonders of the universe. But being absolutely incapable of understanding any of the universal principles by which it is governed, or carrying their ideas beyond this world or themselves, they supposed every thing was made for their use; and that animals were made for them alone. The multitude of suns and planetary systems which fill the immensity of space, were little stars placed in a firmament above their heads, merely to afford them a small twinkling light when the sun and moon should be set. Beyond this firmament they placed the rain: the firmament had gates, which were opened when it pleased their god that the rain should descend. The creation of this world, contemptible as the system appears in an enlightened age, was an object much too vast for their conceptions: they could form no idea of any power or wisdom sufficient to accomplish it; but what wisdom and force wanted, they supposed might be supplied by words which the creator was acquainted with; they ascribed the same virtue to magical words, which, at other times, men have ascribed to magical numbers, and they supposed the world created by these. This absurdity, which seems of a very ancient date, pervades the Arabian tales. "God said let there be light, and there was light." This thought and expression has been quoted as an instance of the true sublime; and certainly it possesses one of the greatest characteristics of sublimity, that of striking the mind with astonishment and wonder; and in an age of ignorance when men could not detect the fallacy of the thought, it may justly have deserved the character of sublimity. The apologists for this apparent absurdity have said, that it was not the virtue of words which created the world, but the will of the creator. But this will not answer their purpose, because the mere will without some active force employed, can produce no effect whatever; even still less than words, for the sounds of words may make us stare, and sometimes tremble.

There is no useful purpose in life that can be answered by our being deceived, or believing what does not exist: on the contrary, the most pernicious consequences may frequently result from it. A due sense of ignorance is the next advantageous situation of man to the absolute knowledge of the truth. The man who knows with certainty the stability of his fortune, his friends, and his resources, is perfectly safe from

ruin. If he is to go a voyage, and knows well that he has a good ship, an intelligent pilot, and a favorable season, he may proceed with a considerable degree of security. If he has a due sense of his ignorance of any of these, he will necessarily proceed with proportionate caution and circumspection, and may probably by these means, escape the dangers to which he would otherwise be exposed. But the man who is absolutely deceived in any of these things, proceeds indeed without fear, and with confidence; but it is to his certain destruction. H.

CREATION—DEITY.

Mr. G. Houston—I noticed in yours of December 10th, that another champion, under the signature of X., has made a sally on the plain, common sense doctrine I have advanced: viz. That the human species must have had a beginning, at some period, and as they could not have created themselves, must of necessity had a creator.

To this rational and self evident position, X. replies, that E. L. Jr. "forgets that man is a compound natural being, composed of part of the four elements, which we have no reason to believe ever had a beginning, or can ever have an end." Now, Mr. Editor, E. L. Jr. would assure X. that he does not forget any such thing; but, because man is a compound natural being, are we to infer that he appears in his present shape by accident and without design? Admit that the four elements never had a beginning, [which is a question foreign to our present subject] does it follow that man, a compound of these elements, also existed in his present shape—or that the elements existed in the form of man from all eternity? Such logic as this does not comport with your correspondent's pretensions to science. It is, in fact, supposing, in his own words, "that nothing made, governs, and directs the whole universe of matter."

X. proceeds: "As we rationally conclude that the four elements have always existed, and knowing that man is a modified part of these elements, proceeded from them, [if man proceeded from the elements there must have been a time when he [proceeded] and is sustained by them, and at his death is again diffused amongst them, it irresistably follows that our species must also have always existed as a part of the great family of nature." Does X. offer this as a specimen of his philosophy? Permit me to illustrate: man is made of something—that something always existed—man being a modification of that something, necessarily proceeded from it, and it irresistably follows that he——made himself. I have never denied that man is material; but have supposed that nothing but an intelligent and designing cause could form the elements into man. It appears to me an absurdity, and a gross one, (though not more gross than many which are easily swallowed in this day) to suppose that the elements, in the absence of an intelligent principle, should produce so astonishing an animal as man. It is demonstrated to us that every human being which has ever existed, (excepting the first pair) must have been produced by generation—a process that could not have been gone into previous to the existence of a pair of the species. If this

pair were produced by accident, by nothing, without an intelligent cause, as X. supposes, why are they not in this day produced in the same manner? X. will form a miracle, or a christian mystery, if he is not careful. I have heard of none so great as that which predicates an effect without a cause—as that which affirms that nothing produced something—that unconscious, unintelligent, and unthinking matter, should assume the beauty, the order, and the harmony of animated nature.

I think it was in your paper I saw a conjecture that man originally came from an egg! Will X. condescend to inform the reader where that curious egg grew? It is very singular that such eggs are not produced in these scientific times.

X. says, "if animal life ever had a beginning;" indeed, this X. will appear pretty consistent at last. I would advise him, hereafter, in an argument of this kind, to maintain that animal life always existed; that there never was a time when there were less than some hundreds of animals on the earth at once; and that the population of the world is at this moment as great as it was ten thousand years ago! He will then be consistent; and his conjectures, no doubt, will excite universal admiration! Philosophers should aim to be consistent; it adds much to their productions, if they do not cross their path more than twice on one page.

Another specimen of this writer's reasoning powers, and I have done. "Should E. L. J. pretend, as some metaphysicians have done, that a succession implies a beginning, I answer, no more than it predicts an end. [That is, it is as rational to suppose that mankind do not exist, as to suppose they have increased in numbers!] And it is as difficult to imagine a beginning of earth, air, fire and water, as it is to imagine a period when no earth, no air, no fire, no water, no caloric, no humidity, no breath of wind, no solidity will exist in space. [But is it difficult to imagine a beginning of the human species? I admit it to be very difficult without acknowledging the agency of an intelligent creator.] It is, therefore, much more consistent and rational in materialists, to conclude that matter, in all its forms, ever existed, and ever will exist, than it is to conjure up an assumed, immaterial, supernatural being, who gave existence to matter."*

It appears to me an irrational conclusion, to suppose matter, in all its forms, ever existed; and the assertion could only have been produced by the "perplexity and confusion of the mind" which gave birth to so absurd an idea. Atheists must avow this absurdity, or their scheme falls;

* A learned author has written as follows: "That which composes the city of New-York, meaning by the city, the streets, the buildings, &c. has existed; that is, the matter existed, the clay, the lime, the sand, the stone, &c. long before there was any such city as New-York; and that which is called the city, is, and ever has been, and probably ever will be, more or less, constantly changing. Now will any one undertake to say that the city of New-York came by chance? Or that it now grows by chance? Certainly not. But would it have been any more by chance if the city had been built by the immediate power of God, instead of being built by human hands? And though it had been built by causes wholly unknown to man, could we then have supposed it was the effect of chance? The city, we know, did not come by chance."

they must declare that man existed from all eternity, or made himself, or else was produced by an intelligent and designing cause. The last conclusion would spoil their theory; yet I am satisfied that all men of sense, sentiment, and science, feel ashamed to avow the two former.

E. L. JR.

From the New-Harmony Gazette.

ETERNAL PUNISHMENT FOR THE HEATHEN.

Oh, judgment, thou hast fled to brutish beasts,
And men have lost their reason.—SHAKESPEARE.

A correspondent of the Connecticut Mirror, in a late number of that periodical, writes upon the question, "Whether it is possible that any should be saved who live and die without having heard of the Christian scriptures, or of Jesus Christ."

The following are, word for word, his conclusions: "The Heathen, who are altogether destitute of the instructions of the scriptures, are *literally* in a lost condition, and *must* perish." "A saviour, of whom no tidings have been communicated, is, to those thus ignorant, no Saviour." "The heathen, without the knowledge of Christ, must die in their sins."

Dreadful indeed must the influence of that superstition be, that can induce a sane mind deliberately to put forth sentiments like these!

Do but consider the subject in its naked horrors. Think of the deity about to create some poor Hottentot or New Zealander. He knows, at the moment he is creating him, that he shall never hear of the scriptures nor of Jesus Christ. He knows, therefore, that he *cannot* exist through eternity except in never-ending tortures. The creator feels and knows that he himself renders the thing *positively impossible*; and knowing and feeling all this, he creates!

I am but a man; yet if I had committed one crime that approached in atrocity to the daily, hourly crimes of a god like this, I would abhor my own existence. I would shrink from myself, as from a poisonous reptile; and from my thoughts, as from the viper's sting. I would give worlds for a cup of Lethe, to drown the maddening recollection of my enormities. If there be such a god, it shall need no eternal fire to revenge the infinite, hopeless torment he is hourly, wilfully, wantonly inflicting. His own reflections, through an eternity of being, are a curse worse than fable has invented, or priest foretold. If there be such a god, it is not in the power of Omnipotence himself to devise a hell beyond the hell of his own thoughts, or to invent torture more exquisite than that he himself must feel.

And they talk to us of infinite goodness! Spirit of Mercy! where was thy influence when man conceived the horrible idea? Where was judgment, reason, consistency, when goodness was defined to mean the first cause of a universe of torture?

If these lost heathens had been created into hell at once, instead of

enjoying a few short years of checkered existence in this world, *that* had been mercy compared to the orthodox dispensation: for then the poor sufferers unknowing the very name of enjoyment, might have found even in that horrible ignorance, a source of alleviation to their tortures. But even this mitigated wretchedness is denied them. With fiendish ingenuity they are made to purchase the few moments of happiness they may enjoy upon earth, at a dreadful increase to their after misery. They are made just to taste the cup of pleasure, that they may, for ever after, appreciate with a quicker sense of its bitterness, the cup of torment.

Suppose a demon, who had formed this world six thousand years ago, and peopled it with sentient and moral creatures. Suppose that he had filled it with suffering only, excluding, with jealous malignity, every thing that could give even a moment's pleasure or enjoyment. Suppose that, after permitting the creatures of his wrath to suffer through a life of sixty, seventy, eighty years, he annihilated them, soul and body. How monstrous the conception! What a mass of wretchedness does it presuppose! This fair earth changed to a great lazaret-house; for its scenes of beauty, only varied pictures of pain and grief; for the song of its birds and the glad voices of its children, only sounds of woe and groans of suffering; for words of affection, only cursings of hatred; for gentleness and peace and tranquil comfort, only wars and jarings and bitter upbraidings! And not one nation nor one individual that should escape; not one small corner over the earth's wide surface, where its miserable inmates might shelter, even for a moment, from their agonies! Imagine this horrible drama continued day by day, year by year, century after century. And then reflect, what we should say or think of its author!

Yet he were an innocent being compared to the orthodox creator. Light were his crimes and impotent his torments, compared to those of the zealot's god. If he had created *one million worlds*, instead of the *one only*, and continued their misery *through myriads of centuries* instead of six thousand years, he would not even then have produced as much suffering as the Christian Jehovah, when he dooms one heathen sinner to an eternal hell. What do I say? as much? not one thousandth part—not one millionth part, as much. When the one eternal victim has endured all that the mortal inhabitants of a million worlds could together endure, through millions of centuries—his everlasting tortures are not shortened, even by the smallest conceivable fraction.

And wherefore, if the tales we are told be true, wherefore is this inconceivable misery inflicted? Is it because the wretched victim, while on earth, heard of a holy book, which was said to contain the words of his creator? That he read this book, and doubted the veracity of those who asserted its divine origin? Is it for this venial offence, this error of his fallible judgment, that the erring criminal is to be doomed to torment, that bids defiance to the powers of conception even of man's wildest imagination? No, no! not even an error of judgment on the part of the human offender can be pleaded as a paltry motive for the vengeance of the divine judge. The poor Hottentot never heard, never dreamt of Christendom's scriptures, or Christendom's saviour. His creator himself excluded him from any such knowledge. And—horrible, horrible is the

conception!—because he has been so excluded by him who made him, and placed him in utter darkness, therefore shall the blinded wretch justly suffer racking pain, and agonizing torture, millions of times beyond all that the human race has ever suffered, or could suffer in any portion of time that figures can express, or our faculties imagine!

Shall we argue with the advocates of a system like this? It is in vain that we search for an argument, beyond the simple statement of their creed. If there be, in human reason and in human feeling, the power to believe absurdities so glaring, after having distinctly seen and felt what it believes, then must the present generation die out in their superstitions; and we must look to the next for clearer heads and better hearts.

R. D. O.

NEW-YORK, SATURDAY, JANUARY 10, 1829.

To our subscribers.—As another number will close the present volume, we will esteem it a favor if our subscribers will not omit to pay their subscriptions on or before the appearance of the first number of the ensuing volume.—Country subscribers, where we have agents, will settle with them; otherwise they can remit by mail. If those who are in the city, or vicinity, would pay at our office, it would save us the expense of collection, which as our subscription list at present stands, is no inconsiderable object. The paper must unavoidably be discontinued to all who are in arrears.

Several valuable communications on file, will have a place in our forthcoming volume; in which we also intend to resume the publication of the lectures delivered before the *Free Press Association*, and of such works, calculated to promote the diffusion of liberal principles, as are not generally to be met with in the United States. In pursuing this plan, we wish to render the *Correspondent* a library of *real knowledge*, which alone can promote the happiness of man; and to explode every system that cannot bear investigation. Our sole object being the attainment of Truth, we shall never hesitate in our inquiries to go as far as the torch of Reason will guide us.

To correspondents.—J. F. will appear in our next.

Our correspondent, G. L., is mistaken in supposing that we ever pledged ourselves to “advocate the cause of deism,” or of any *ism*, whatever. If he will turn to our prospectus, he will find it there distinctly stated that “the pages of the *Correspondent* will be devoted chiefly to communications, and to miscellaneous articles, calculated to enlarge the mind, and bring man back to the path from which he has deviated. Although we recognize nothing to be true that is incapable of proof, or demonstration, the erroneous opinions entertained by individuals can form no apology for the neglect or the violation of the rules of courtesy. No illiberal discussions, or personalities, will be permitted—it shall be our constant aim to establish a character for temperate and sober reasoning, for *open investigation*, and for universal conciliation.”

Had we excluded every thing from our columns that was not strictly

a "defence of deism," we should then have forfeited our claim to "open investigation," and been justly censurable for partiality. Besides, it would be paying a very poor compliment to mankind in general, to suppose them so wedded to early prejudices as that they would listen to no theological or philosophical discussion, unless the topic exactly coincided with their preconceived ideas. Bigots, we know, act a part so unreasonable; but bigotry is fast giving way to rational principles; and few are now to be met with, unless it be amongst the priesthood, who do not readily acknowledge that free and open investigation on all subjects, is the only way to elicit truth. It is only when, in the course of our inquiries, we are induced to curb our reasoning faculties, that we become the dupes of interested men, and the instruments of gratifying their inordinate passions. Man was never yet injured by carrying his investigations as far as truth can lead him. But it is easy to show that those systems which have exacted implicit faith from their votaries, are the true cause of all the misery with which humanity is afflicted.

Miss Wright's Lectures.—The excitement occasioned by this lady's lectures, has been greater than any thing of the kind ever before witnessed in this city. That a *female* should ascend the rostrum, is not a circumstance attended with much novelty either in this country or in Europe; but that one so gifted, so eloquent, and so undaunted in avowing the truth, should appear amongst us, is an occurrence so uncommon, if, indeed, it ever had a parallel, that it could not fail to attract more than ordinary attention. Night after night, have thousands crowded the Masonic Hall, and City Hotel, to listen to, to applaud, and to be instructed by the lessons of philosophy which flowed with so much sweetness, and so much force from the lips of this unrivalled orator—She spoke not of a heaven, nor of a hell—she offered no unintelligible creed for the adoption of her fascinated auditory—yet she did fascinate them by a masterly application, on the side of truth, of that eloquence which Nature has so bountifully conferred on her, but which has hitherto been employed in promulgating error, for the purpose of enslaving, instead of emancipating the human mind. In the bold stand taken by this lady, one fact at least has been demonstrated—that even in this priest-ridden city, with its hundred churches—its incalculable number of learned theologians—the very nursery of the bible, tract, Sunday union, and other pious institutions, which *promise* so largely, but *perform* so little in promoting human happiness—she has, without the surreptitious aids of mystery and ceremony, and with the full tide of popular prejudice against her, excited, too, by a base and dastardly press—attracted as numerous and respectable audiences as ever graced a public meeting. Judges, lawyers, merchants—in fact the most respectable portion of our citizens, accompanied by their wives and daughters, have vied with each other in the constancy of their attendance; and the only regret we have heard expressed on the subject has been, that many who were desirous of hearing her, could not be accommodated, owing to the place in which she lectured not being sufficiently large to receive the crowds who applied for admission.

As a matter of curiosity, we have glanced over the diurnal press of this city, for the purpose of ascertaining in what light they viewed the proceedings of Miss Wright. Although, taking them in the aggregate (and we know well how to estimate the movements of our editors) they have shown less of that asperity than we anticipated, we could not fail to discover indications of subserviency to prevailing opinions, and, in one or two instances where we had looked for something like liberality, an indulgence in terms and epithets, which might gratify a momentary spleen, but of which, we are persuaded, those who penned them would on calm reflection be the first to be ashamed. We may, perhaps, have occasion to go more at length into this subject in a future number. At no period have we had greater cause than the present to confide in the truth of our motto—*magna est veritas et prevalebit*.

Paine's birth day.—The 29th inst. being the anniversary of the birth of THOMAS PAINE, it will be celebrated by a public dinner, in the New York Coffee House, No. 10 William-st. ; dinner on the table at three o'clock, P. M. Tickets, \$1 each, to be had at the bar of the Coffee House, and at the office of the Correspondent, No. 6 William-street.

Free Press Association.—The meetings of the Association are now held in the Marlborough Hotel, corner of Hester-st. and Bowery. A *theological* lecture will be delivered in the afternoon of Sunday (to-morrow,) the 11th inst., at three o'clock precisely ; and in the evening, at half past six, the debates will be resumed on the following question:

Whether a revelation by a supreme being has ever been made to man ; and if so, what are the evidences?

Admittance to the debates, three cents. Ladies free.

MISCELLANEOUS.

The Edinburgh Zetetic Society's Shorter Catechism.

Concluded from page 403.

Question. What portion of the bible do you refer to, as opposed to existing facts ?

Answer. The first chapter which the bible contains speaks of a 'firmament,' called heaven, which divides the waters from the waters ; in which firmament, we are told, God set 'two great lights,' and the 'stars also,' for the purpose of giving light upon the earth. The literal meaning of this account is so much opposed to the doctrines of modern astronomy that we must consider it calculated to give to the young and the ignorant very erroneous ideas of the system of the universe.

Q. What portion of the bible is opposed to the laws of Nature ?

A. We cannot believe in miracles without first being convinced that the laws of nature are *changeable* ; while demonstrable truth would lead us to believe *that* the laws of nature are *the eternal laws of an eternal power*. It is upon these considerations that we doubt the truth of a narrative which informs us that the harmony of the solar system was suspended for a whole day, for the unworthy purpose of giving light to one set of barbarians, to enable them more effectually to massacre another still more barbarous than themselves. Especially when the difficulty can easily be solved, by believing that the above statement is erroneous.

Q. What portion of the bible is opposed to common decency ?

A. The transactions of Lot and his daughters, of Onan and Judah, form narratives which every thinking man would blush to read before his wife or children ; and there are many more of a similar description.

Q. Is it upon these, and similar passages, that unbelievers have their doubts ?

A. They seem to have no doubts upon the subject ; because they appear to be convinced that such passages are altogether erroneous and injurious.

Q. Is it for disturbing the national faith in such passages that individuals are punished ?

A. It is the belief of such passages that constitutes the weakness of the present established faith ; for it cannot possibly be either the interest or inclination of a single human being to deny any thing which is self-evident, or which is in unison with the impressions which are made by demonstrable truth. Neither is it possible by any means to disturb our faith in any thing of this description ; consequently, the only faith that can be disturbed, is faith in these absurdities ; and for doing so, men are styled blasphemers, and punished accordingly.

Q. Is it possible to make individuals believe such doctrines by force ?

A. It is now pretty generally known that force can only make mankind hypocrites. It can do nothing more. Those who think it their duty to cherish such notions, content themselves with the idea that unbelievers, when they come to die, will cling to these absurdities, to appease the wrath of an offended deity.

Q. What are the ideas of unbelievers on this subject ?

A. Unbelievers refuse their assent to such absurdities, because they consider the belief of them derogatory to the dignity of the power that created them. They have no fears upon this head, because they feel that they have not the power to think otherwise ; and besides, they have the certain knowledge, that they are during every moment of their lives, as much in the hand of the creator here as they can be any where, or at any other time ; and it would be unreasonable in them to fear a change of treatment from that power whose nature is immutable.

Q. Is demonstrable truth the general characteristic of established religion ?

A. The established faith of a nation is merely the opinions of the strongest party ; which opinions, in many cases, are founded, not on demonstrable truth, but upon traditionary legends, which have had their origin in the days of dark and gross ignorance. It is worthy of remark,

that the charity or forbearance of the people is always in proportion to the soundness of their opinions; and their intolerance, bigotry and persecution, invariably correspond with the quantity of error which they have unintentionally imbibed.

Q. What is the characteristic of Christianity?

A. The practical rule of Christianity is extremely simple; and according to the words of its founder, it contains within itself the essence of all religion. It says, "Whatsoever ye would that man should do unto you, do ye even so unto them, for this is the law and the prophets."

Q. Is this rule acknowledged in Britain?

A. It is part and parcel of the law of the land.

Q. Have the members of the established church any title to act in opposition to the law of the land?

A. No—From the assumed superiority of their opinions, they are considered rather to be a pattern of obedience to others.

Q. What privileges have the members of the established church assumed for themselves?

A. The law of Christianity allows them the privilege of openly expressing, promulgating and disseminating their own opinions;—and a law which they have made, in opposition to the law of Christianity, allows them to tax others (who have different opinions,) for the support of their peculiar opinions; and over and above all this, they act as if they had another law, which makes it blasphemy for any one to express or promulgate opinions which have a tendency to convince the people that the established opinions are wrong.

Q. Is it an advantage to a people to have any doctrines impressed on their minds, about which they are apt to feel alarmed or uneasy?

A. It is undoubtedly a grievous calamity to have erroneous notions impressed on the mind, in infancy; but the various nations have no choice in the matter. And it so happens, that the individuals when they grow to manhood, are all highly delighted with their own reveries; and as I have said, they uniformly consider it blasphemy in those who attempt to undeceive them.

Q. What is blasphemy?

A. Blasphemy may be styled the act of distributing the established faith of a nation, the doctrines, which its inhabitants have been taught to consider sacred, and which, at the same time, are at variance with demonstrable truth.

Q. How do you know that blasphemy is confined to the denial of such doctrines?

A. Because the denial of doctrines, which are supported by demonstrable truth, excites in the mind of any one no feelings but those of pity towards those who dispute or deny them.

Q. Is blasphemy the same in all nations?

A. The opinions of nations and individuals, as to what constitutes blasphemy, are continually changing. That which is styled blasphemy in one age or nation, is generally considered the essence of truth or good sense, in another age or nation.

Q. Does the past history of the world afford any instances of individuals having been justly punished for blasphemy?

A. The authentic records of history afford numberless instances of individuals having been punished for disturbing the faith of nations, when that faith was founded in error; but I am not aware of an individual, in a single instance, having been punished for disturbing a faith which was founded in truth.

Q. Has the punishment of blasphemy been generally the same in different ages, and among different nations?

A. It has, invariably, become less sanguinary as nations have improved in civilization. At one time, its victims were put to death in the cruelest manner. Now, blasphemers are only confined in dungeons for a series of years, at the pleasure of those who put them there.

Q. Is this the case in Britain at this day?

A. Yes—Richard Carlile is going his fifth year (12th December, 1823) of close imprisonment, for disturbing the faith of the people in the disputed portions of the scripture of the old and new testament, and many others, male and female, are now suffering for a similar offence.

Q. Does Jesus Christ give any commands in the New Testament, to his followers to punish those who disturb their faith?

A. He does not. It appears that he had disturbed the faith of the Jewish nation in some of their traditionary doctrines. He was accused by an association of well meaning fanatics, priests, and lawyers of deceiving the young, and the ignorant, by the dissemination of blasphemy; he was tried and condemned by a judge, who acted more in accordance with the intolerant prejudices of the people, than principles of justice; and the sentence was carried into execution by the constituted authorities, with the consent and approbation of a deluded superstitious multitude, who continued to insult the victim of persecution, and to mock his sufferings to the last.

Q. What feelings did this treatment produce?

A. He knew that his persecutors acted in this way, because their intellects had been destroyed in their infancy, by erroneous impressions having been made upon their minds, before they were capable of distinguishing truth from error; and so sensible was he of the wretched condition of those who, by these means were thus placed under the influence of delusion and intolerant prejudice, that instead of blaming them for their intolerance he seemed to forget his own suffering, through pity and compassion for them.

Q. Is every species of persecution the effect of ignorance?

A. Persecution is meant to prop up truth, and to keep down error. Truth is a well connected fabric, founded on a rock—sound at the heart—and all composed of the same materials, so firmly put together that (so far from requiring artificial truth) it is found that no human power is able to pull it down; while error is an unshapely mass of unsound materials, and through the attention of its supporters is continually occupied in making it resemble truth in its outward appearance; yet, being founded on sand, and rotten at the heart, when the foundation is undermined, it tumbles to the ground, covering its supporters with confusion; in spite of all the props which human ingenuity can bring forward to keep it up; and the past experience of the world has shewn, that persecution, or intolerance, (these artificial props,) have been invariably brought for-

ward to support error and delusion, in opposition to truth. Who then, who knows what truth is, and who has any reasoning power remaining, will fail to discover, that all intolerance or persecution, proceeds in every instance from ignorance and delusion?

St. John Climacus was caverned as a hermit in a rock, near Mount Sinai, in Syria, and became, at seventy-five, abbot and superior-general of all the monks and hermits of the country. He admired one of the principal citizens of Alexandria, in Egypt, who, petitioning to become a monk, was ordered to remain without the gate, and manifested his obedience by staying there for seven years, and begging prayers for his leprous soul of every passenger. St. John also admired a monkish cook, because he generally cried while he cooked, and assigned as a reason, that "the fire he always had before his eyes, reminded him of that fire which will burn souls for all eternity." It is related that a woman who had committed so enormous a sin that she dare not confess it, came to St. John, who bade her write it, and seal it, and give it to him, and he would pray for her; this she did, and shortly after St. John died. The woman sorely afraid that her written secret would be read, wept and prayed at St. John's tomb, and begged he would appear and tell her what he had done with the paper; on a sudden, St. John came forth habited like a bishop, with a bishop on each side of him, and he said to the woman, "Why troublest thou me so much, and these saints with me? thou sufferest us to have no rest: look here, our clothes are all wet with tears." Then he delivered to her the paper, sealed as she had given it to him, and said, "See here, look at the seal, open the writing, and read it." So she did; and she found all her sin "defaced clean out;" and instead thereof was written, "All thy sins are forgiven, and put away by the prayer of St. John, my servant." Then she returned thanks, and St. John and his two bishops returned to their sepulchres.

Difference of opinions.—We should always bear in mind that the most certain of all axioms, that all difference of opinions among mankind is nothing more than a difference in their knowledge. If they would but instruct and be instructed, instead of seeking to do each other the greatest possible amount of injury, because of a difference in opinion, in knowledge more and less, they would soon begin to look back upon past ages or races of mankind, as brutes reduced to the lowest scale, by the brutalizing powers of religion. We want a moral people without religion; as it is impossible to make a people at the same time religious and moral.

* * We understand that Miss Wright and her co-editors have determined on removing their paper from New-Harmony to this city. It will be issued here on the first week in March next, and continued weekly, under the title of "The Free Enquirer." Subscriptions will be received at their office, 19 Murray-street. Terms \$3 per annum, in advance.

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